

Title	Dislocated Composition: Overview, Transcript and Selected Articles with Reference to The Necropolitan Line
Type	Article
URL	https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/12189/
Date	2017
Citation	Palmer, Katrina (2017) Dislocated Composition: Overview, Transcript and Selected Articles with Reference to The Necropolitan Line. Journal for Writing in Creative Practice, 10 (1). pp. 55-75. ISSN 1753-5190 (Print); 1753-5204 (Online)
Creators	Palmer, Katrina

Usage Guidelines

Please refer to usage guidelines at <http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact ualresearchonline@arts.ac.uk.

License: Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives

Unless otherwise stated, copyright owned by the author

Journal of Writing in Creative Practice

Volume 10 Number 1

© 2017 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/jwcp.10.1.55_1

KATRINA PALMER

Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts

Dislocated composition: Overview, transcript and selected articles with reference to The Necropolitan Line

Keywords

found objects
sculpture
storytelling
the London Necropolis
Railway
the body
semaphores

Abstract

The following work makes reference to The Necropolitan Line, an exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (December 2015–February 2016). The Exhibition Composition and Overview is drawn from the various forms of information that were originally provided for the gallery employees. This information is interspersed with physical descriptions of the exhibited items. Implicitly about unsettled bodies, the text makes no attempt to resolve the resultant combination of positions: it situates itself in the present tense while it locates the exhibition in the past; it refers to the artist in the third person and exploits multiple sources without asserting an overall voice. The first part of the work provides the context for the storytelling, which is the body of the work, here dislocated to the two appendices. These contain the transcript for a live reading and a reformulated selection of newspaper articles from the exhibition.

Exhibition composition and overview

General information

The Necropolitan Line

Henry Moore Institute

Galleries one, two and three

10 December 2015–21 February 2016

The exhibition is commissioned with Head of Sculpture Studies, Lisa Le Feuvre and curator Pavel Pys. *The Necropolitan Line*, the exhibition title, makes explicit reference to the London Necropolis Railway (LNR), a train service that ran from Waterloo in London to what remains the United Kingdom's largest cemetery that opened in 1852, at Brookwood, in Surrey. The LNR was established in 1854 for the exclusive use of parties of mourners, enabling them to travel with the deceased. Numerous large-scale cemeteries were established as part of the solution for the massive increase in population at that time. The train declined in popularity, and when the LNR platform was bombed in 1941, the line was closed and never reopened.

Gallery one

Lightboxes

Lightboxes display semaphore images and provide the only illumination in this gallery.

Lightbox One (nearest to the entrance of pair)

Two single trackside semaphore units from 1950s/60s

The signals indicate STOP

Duotrans in standard lightbox

Lightbox Two (furthest from the entrance of pair)

Triple white signals semaphore gantry 1950s/60s

The signals indicate STOP

Duotrans in standard lightbox

Lightbox Three (single)

Dual semaphore unit 1950s/60s

The signals indicate CAUTION

Duotrans in standard lightbox

NB: The photographic negatives for the images in the lightboxes were purchased from an anonymous private seller who noted: 'I have no info on the photographer at all, he is deceased though and I was given these by my dad to sell or print – we must have had them for many years because I remember the yellow and red boxes they are in, in my parents house before I left home. I have tried to find out by asking friends etc., some of the images are a bit Gifford Esq, and I had hoped someone would know, but I have had no names as yet' (Figures 1–3).



Figure 1: STOP (Found negative, triple white signals semaphore gantry 1950s/60s, original photographer unknown.)



Figure 2: STOP (Found negative, two single trackside semaphore units from 1950s/60s, original photographer unknown.).



Figure 3: STOP (Found negative, Midland Railway semaphore gantry at Trent 28.1.67, original photographer unknown.)

Waterloo signal box diagram

A hand-drawn plan for the illuminated diagram for the signal box at Waterloo was produced in 1936. Scanned from the original, which was loaned by Mr Garland and di-bond mounted on aluminum.

One two-seater standard aluminum bench

Sound, emanating from Tannoy speaker

Katrina Palmer's voice plus an adapted section of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no. 2 in C minor (1900) played by Adam Wilson. This Concerto is used in the film *Brief Encounter* (David Lean [dir.], 1945; story by Noël Coward). The Rachmaninov is abbreviated so that first few notes of the motif form a brief tonal introduction to each of a series of verbal announcements such as 'please walk towards the light', 'please stand back from the Platform edge', 'we are sorry for the recently departed' and 'we are sorry for being sorry', duration 13:04 minutes.

The platform

The slope at the beginning of the replica of a contemporary platform is at the far end of the gallery. It is accessible and utilized by visitors. Yellow and white thermoplastic lines and tactile paving stones mark the structure's edge. Visitors can choose to climb onto the platform, or they may walk through at ground level.

Gallery two

The platform

The platform that begins in gallery one and runs straight through gallery two. The platform backs onto a wooden picket fence.

Two three-seater standard aluminum benches

The benches, situated on the platform, can be used by visitors.

Railway headlight

An operational railway headlight is situated at the far end of the gallery. It runs on a timer and changes from green to red, to white.

Lightbox

The lightbox is partially visible through the slats of the wooden fence at the back of the platform (Figure 4).

Lightbox four

Midland Railway semaphore gantry at Trent, 28 January 1967

The signals indicate STOP

Duotrans in standard lightbox



Figure 4: CLEAR (Found negative, single trackside semaphore unit 1950s/60s, original photographer unknown.)

Sound, emanating from two Tannoy speakers

Katrina Palmer's voice plus an adapted section of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no. 2 in C minor (1900) played by Adam Wilson. This Concerto is used in the film *Brief Encounter* (David Lean [dir.], 1945; story by Noël Coward). The audio extends the announcements and music that can still be partially heard from gallery one. Visitors are informed about departures and deaths. Drawing on the articles in the newspaper, a fragmented description is given of railway signals and the directions they imply. There is an account of the displacement of bodies via the LNR, which is narrated alongside the fate of hundreds of women, dismissed as prostitutes, discovered in an unconsecrated burial ground at Cross Bones, London Bridge. The narratives collide in a series of goodbyes and apologies. The words are accompanied by the piano motif that extends into a fuller version of *Brief Encounter*/Rachmaninov Concerto, duration 21:32 minutes.

Gallery three

The platform

Steps lead from the surface of the platform in gallery two to the floor in gallery three.

Lightbox

The lightbox is situated beside the lift (Figure 5).

Lightbox five

Single trackside semaphore unit 1950s/60s

The signals indicate CLEAR

Duotrans in standard lightbox

One two-seater standard aluminum bench

The Institute's goods lift

The following instructions, provided for the 'Lift operator', are not available to the public:

- On the hour, every hour one invigilator adopts the role of 'The lift operator'
- On the hour, s/he blows the whistle once and announces 'Lift about to descend'
- The whistle is a 1960s British Rail model
- Visitors are to be encouraged to enter the lift

- 'The lift operator' takes victors to street level where they exit the building; they are not permitted to return with 'The lift operator' to gallery level
- The lift must operate whether or not there are passengers
- When not in use the right-hand wooden door should be opened to the maximum; the left-hand 45 degrees to the lift entrance; both layers of metal doors should be open
- The lift should not be swept or cleaned
- At the private view from 5 p.m., an extra service on the half-hour should operate
- While 'The lift operator' is working, the remaining invigilator should be in gallery two.

Sound in lift

A single pair of headphones is situated at the back of the lift, playing two versions of 'Is That All There Is?' by Peggy Lee (1969) and Bette Midler (2005), remixed and combined by Katrina Palmer, duration 4.26 minutes.

Stack of newspapers, The Line

A stack of copies of the newspaper are available to be read in the galleries and are free to take away. An edition of 14,000 has been made. The articles from *The Line* were adapted for the exhibition's tannoy announcements. The objects in the exhibition are also situated in the newspaper in the form of texts and images. Semaphore signals are considered as objects with the capacity to convey words and for their potential to mislead. As well as the semaphores, the articles include archival photographs of the LNR, contemporary photographs of the remnants of the LNR and of Cross Bones burial ground. Charles Dickens' 'The Signalman', 1866, appears in the original edition. Other narratives develop with reference to the historic sites and imagined characters including: the women who are buried at Cross Bones, active in their underground location; an unreliable signalman; the PA, a disembodied platform announcer, a lost soul who inhabits the tannoy system; the Coupler, a woman paid to say goodbye to lonely commuters at the edge of the Platform.

Live reading of The Uncoupling

The Coupler, an article from *The Line* newspaper, is reformulated as a script for a reading at the HML, 10 February 2016. Narrated by Katrina Palmer and accompanied by Adam Wilson on Piano. The predominantly live piano and voice are interspersed with recordings.



Figure 5: CAUTION (Found negative, dual semaphore unit 1950s/60s, original photographer unknown.)

Appendix one

The uncoupling

Henry Moore Institute Live, 10 February 2016

Narrated by Katrina Palmer accompanied by Adam Wilson on Piano

Narrator: With careful attention, if we focus our perception, we might just produce a thought together. We can see a bench in the distance. The interspace, separating here, from there is irrelevant. But the bench has significance as does its location on a railway platform. As a utilitarian example of modular seating, the bench boasts distinctive features: perforated cold-rolled steel seats, a silver epoxy powder coating, an aluminium frame and cast feet polished to a chrome effect.

Looking again there is someone on the bench. It is a woman. She holds our attention, temporarily. We see how her feet appear to rest on the platform's stone surface but in fact it is the bench that supports her body, which curves and bends at right angles to follow the manufactured undulations of steel contours.

More than a synthetic form, our woman is in possession of her own mindfulness that she now reorientates as she turns towards a man who approaches her from the far end of the platform. As he walks towards her, we watch the isolation of her lonely figure transform from self-containment to receptiveness. The man takes a seat. In keeping with the conventions of good social practice, he initially ignores the woman. The fact that they share the bench appears to be unpremeditated. She stares at him nonetheless.

From our perspective, it looks like she is calculating the effect of his presence or simply making sense of the nearness of another warm human body on the cold metal bench.

Tannoy: *The next train is delayed. Please remain on the platform until a further announcement is made.*

Narrator: The man who sat next to the woman, now takes advantage of the situation: the woman's attention, in this shared congenial space, combines with the announcement to create a customary opportunity for strangers to converse. 'These damned trains, they're always late' he says, then asks, how long had she been waiting. The woman corrects him. She is not expecting a train to arrive. On the contrary, she has been waiting for him. She is, she explains, a Coupler and, as such, she is here to provide him with a service. Now perplexed, the man asks her to elucidate.

While she speaks she settles back into stainless aluminium contours. There are risky relationships that she is required to indulge in. She never used to consider the consequences, but now has to confess, the implications and insinuations are far more serious than she could ever have

imagined. 'We live in violent and unpredictable times', she says, 'so it's unsurprising when things end badly'.

The man looks her up and down, and notices how the sleeve of her overcoat conceals one of her hands. He wonders if it is missing. In the other, she clutches a slim book, a white hardback, unmarked.

The woman continues with her explanation. She is paid to say goodbye on the platform. They are a small but efficient team who offer a specialized, mechanically aided experience for private departures. The people who use the Couplers are people like him, men who usually slip through any number of public spaces, pushing against gates, thrusting cards into slots, allowing their fingers to glide over handrails but rarely if ever making intentional contact with their fellow human beings. She says, it is about a lack of time as much as anything. Her job is to make a few minutes seem precious by providing a brief but sensual interaction. 'You'll get a good sending off with me', she says.

Tannoy: *More information about the late running train will follow. Please wait for further announcements.*

Narrator: The rubber soles of the man's shoes shuffle against the platform's stone surface. He asks her again to explain: what is it that she actually does here. It seems peculiar that he is never encountered any one who has made use of such a goodbye or uncoupling service. Where are her previous clients? What exactly happened to the others? She needs to tell him more about the illicit contrivances of her operation, he demands, probing deeper, egging her on.

The woman replies, 'We get so close, anything's possible. If I was a bitch, which I'm not, but if I was, I could easily push someone like you over the edge of the platform. But there's no need to look concerned. In practice, this is how I work, by the book. When a customer arrives we approach each other and move towards the departure zone. We touch and ultimately embrace with a precise series of movements performed with graceful efficiency before the letting go. One of the novelties is the handcrafted bespoke appliances that aid every manoeuvre. It's all laid out in the handbook'.

She taps her hardback. 'The work is physical but mediated by our tools, apparatus and guide-lines. I shouldn't really be telling you this'.

Tannoy: *The train is expected imminently.*

Narrator: Although one hand remains retracted within her sleeve, she uses the concealed stump of her arm to indicate someone she describes as a colleague, on the adjacent bench. She lowers her voice and confides that it feels like they are becoming especially close. 'In the final moment', she says, 'When I weaken and reveal all the emotion of what I want from my connection to you, I know full well, you'll disappoint me. You will. I persist in making myself available for something real but

the men who chose to see me, never return. I know the stakes. Every departure is expected to be heartfelt and fervent because you leavers pay to feel something, temporarily. But why do so many of you choose to use your tools inappropriately? You squeeze as much out of me as you can; insistent tongues, groping hands. A lot can occur beneath an overcoat. The appearance of a simple pressing together of bodies conceals more intimate movements: palpitations and subtle hardenings, rapid fingers making quiet insertions right here at the boundary where the stone edging of the platform falls away.

Do you see it?' She asks him, 'I could so easily thrust someone away from me and over the precipice. Or I could take you with me when I go. A goodbye is about loss so should never include fulfilment'. Her voice switches down another decibel, 'You mustn't look so concerned. I can assure you, the contact we make will be fleeting, much like my more malevolent fantasies. And this handbook covers all aspects of the operation in the most practical manner. There's even a whole section devoted to classic lines. We learn them, then we pick the most appropriate to say in the terminal moment of each decoupling', she says, opening her book and leafing through the lines, 'Must you go? Yes, you must and I'll stand here trembling [...] I'll say to myself he didn't go [...] There's still time, really there's no time at all [...] Are these the last few precious minutes we have together? [...] The touch of his hand on my shoulder for a moment [...] Is this really it?'

Tannoy: *The train is approaching the platform. Please stand back from the edge.*

Narrator: With the insistent roar of an engine now clearly audible, she seems to be preparing herself to make direct physical contact with the man. She closes her book and places it on the bench where its solid white rectangular form contrasts sharply with perforated aluminium. 'In the midst of every embrace I swear I feel the approach of something coming for me', she warns him. 'Something powerful that thunders, a real thing, I know its coming. Can you feel it too? Of course not. No one wants a lasting connection. And what's to become of me? I'm left here where everyone else passes through [...] But not this time [...] I have you at my side and you'll never say goodbye'.

Tannoy: *The fast approaching train is non-stopping. Stay behind the yellow line at all times.*

Narrator: The signals change, red, green, white. Illuminated sparks of bright light are startling. She leans towards him, 'Do you think that you're in love with someone else? Even if you are, you should look down the line, at the whole story. That love will be over in an instant, one of you will die, the other left heart broken, in time, everything here will have gone'.

The man, who suddenly understands why people give money to leave this woman behind, now gets up, as if to go, but as he takes a step away, she too gets up from the bench and lunges towards him. He rushes across slabs of grey stone paving. She follows. Tactile paving under foot. The flash

of a thermoplastic painted lines, yellow, then white. They're at the very precipice of the platform. Against the clamour of locomotion, she presses her hand against his mouth. 'No, don't say it', she says, 'this is really it'.

Tannoy: *Please stand back from the platform edge.*

Narrator: The man and the Coupler are struggling with each other, bonded in their furious embrace. As he tries to separate himself from her claim on his body, a curved angular object emerges from her sleeve. A bracelet of some kind? No, it is a large metallic hook: an ugly thing, potent with the dreadful inevitability of its function. He is never moved so fast, back tracking rapidly, snatching the handbook from the bench as he makes his get away, escaping her parting words, 'The touch of his hand on my shoulder for a moment'.

She opens the Handbook and reads an extract entitled *Standard Coupling* Patent No. 138, 405 E. H. Janney

When it is desired to couple, one of the couplings should have its hook in the about position. Then as they come together the arm will be necessarily struck by the head, and be consequently forced back into its recess, the spring-lever yielding sufficiently for this purpose, in which position it will be securely locked by the return of the lever to place by the action of the spring after the arm has passed it. They are then securely coupled, and cannot be disconnected except by pulling back the lever. The arm of the hook is made to project for the purpose of insuring its being forced back into the recess by the entrance of the other hook, even if it does not approach in a straight line.

The faces of the hooks where they bear against each other are made curved, for the purpose of permitting the parts to have the necessary play upon each other as they rise and fall unequally, and also to adapt the faces to each other when not in the same vertical planes. The hook is provided with a suitable stop by means of which its movement when opened is properly limited. A cap, of any suitable construction, is employed to cover the slotted opening in the head, the same being slipped over the lever by means of which the entrance of undesirable substances is effectually prevented. Any form of spring may, of course, be employed in connection with the lever, which later may be arranged, if desired, to project from the side instead of the top of the head.

The advantages of the described couplings are numerous. They will couple readily under all circumstances if one of the hooks is open but will not couple if both are closed. It is adapted for use upon cars of different heights. They have no lateral or longitudinal play, but move freely vertically. It is impossible for them to become uncoupled unless they leave the

Platform. By means of the hold a link can be used to connect to the head. They are uncoupled at any time without the least difficulty by simply pulling back the lever to hold it either out of contact with the arm of the hook or to lock the latter in place.

It will be observed that the line of curvature between the head and guard arm is precisely the same as that of the hook and the head, by which means the parts, when they come together, are made to interlock closely.

Narrator: With careful attention, if we focus our perception we might produce a thought together. We can still see the bench in the distance. The interspace, separating here from there, is now extending. The long stretch of the platform reaches back towards something missing. We watch bodies passing over. The bench itself might have been significant. At first we moved towards it. Perhaps we connected and depended on it before this detachment. As a utilitarian example of modular seating, the bench boasts distinctive features: perforated cold-rolled steel seats, a silver epoxy powder coating, an aluminium frame and cast feet polished to a chrome effect. And on this bench sits the woman who held our attention, temporarily.

Appendix two

The Line

Selected articles reformulated from the newspaper *The Line*, originally produced on the occasion of the exhibition *The Necropolitan Line*, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, December 2015–February 2016

Inner city of the dead transformed into wild garden

On London's Redcross Way, next to London Bridge, an unmarked, unconsecrated mass grave containing an estimated 15,000 women and children is about to reopen as a wild garden. A flurry of colourful ribbons and random tokens on steel fencing mark the Cross Bones site that is regularly visited by small gatherings of protesters, writers and a handful of lingering Goths.

The land had been used since medieval times for the ignominious disposal of women who were condemned as prostitutes, along with their unborn or unwanted children and later any local paupers whose bodies were rejected by the Church. The diminutive 'single-women's churchyard' was crammed with corpses until it finally closed in 1853 for being 'completely overcharged with dead'. The ground could no longer be turned without uprooting scarred skeletal remains and ragged patches of clothing attached to decomposing flesh. From this gruesome entanglement, many body parts were snatched for anatomy classes at the nearby Guy's Hospital. A macabre ending for vulnerable lives, made all the more horrific by the list of causes of death: gonorrhoea,

smallpox, tuberculosis, scurvy, syphilis and rickets, diseases of endemic poverty and overcrowding, and evidence of systematic dehumanization.

At the time of the ground's closure, there had been a massive expansion in the population and a correlated increase in deaths, creating an excess of decaying matter. Necropoleis or 'cities of the dead' were established on the outskirts of major conurbations. Between 1832 and 1841 new London cemeteries were established at Kensal Green, West Norwood, Highgate, Abney Park, Nunhead, Brompton and Tower Hamlets. In 1849, what is still the United Kingdom's largest cemetery, known as the London Necropolis, was built at Brookwood, Surrey. The Necropolis was served by its own dedicated service, the LNR which opened the year after Cross Bones closed. Until 1941, it ran from an exclusive terminal at Waterloo, conveying funeral parties and corpses to their graves. The LNR terminus, rebuilt in 1902, still stands at Westminster Bridge Road.

A portion of the morbid mass at Cross Bones was shovelled up, disinterred and displaced to the Necropolis via the LNR. Separated from the body of its sisters, the deformed conglomeration of indistinguishable individuals, expelled without accompaniment of mourners, travelled third class. The remaining inhabitants were then forgotten between numerous attempts to build on the site. Gruesome discoveries halted construction work, forming a defence against pressure for the increasingly central location.

Today, the ground is owned by Transport for London, a spokesperson for which has given an undertaking they will not succumb to commercial pressures. Instead, a wild garden will commemorate the women interred at Cross Bones. An inner city of the dead in the centre of twenty-first-century London, its citizens are an unthinkable, nameless conglomeration, absorbed by darkness and anonymity. It seems possible that the pathetic remnants of their materially thin existences have compressed to form an immense subhuman mass of sisterhood, fused with each other, bonded in earth. From there a scattering of low trees have drawn their roots and somehow reach up with misshapen limbs that wave at us from the medieval city's heavily compacted earth. Perhaps the women have finally stirred, rotating concomitantly, only now reeling to the carefree tones of the fairground that was sited above them in 1884 (*The Line*: 1).

Can you throw light on the illuminated diagram?

The destruction of Waterloo's iconic 1936 signal box concealed a further significant loss: the illuminated diagram that was housed inside it. These stunning examples of signal box apparatus are used as a visual guide by the signal operators. Luminescent lines on a black background form an automated system that is synchronized in real time to indicate movement along the tracks. The diagram of most interest includes a depiction of the siding for the LNR. It is likely that this magnificent artefact has found its way into a private collection. Given its historical significance, railway enthusiasts

and collectors of signalling and LNR memorabilia have been asked to come forward with any information of its whereabouts. And a note to anyone travelling on the main line into Waterloo today: if you happen to be on the southernmost side as you approach the station, the historic tracks of the Necropolis Railway siding remain clearly visible (*The Line*: 6).

Negative and faulty signals bound to mislead according to new documentary

The contemporary platform has long been accused of inertia and even dormancy, and now the discovery of negative and faulty semaphores has led to complaints about systemic failures. A damaging, but informative, new documentary cites signalling expert C. B. Byles, the highly respected author of the *The First Principles of Railway Signalling*. Byles was asked to comment with regard to the accepted and accurate functioning of the apparatus and to give an indication of the possible cause of defective signals, as well as the potential misinterpretations of accurate signs.

C. B. Byles: 'The ubiquitous semaphore itself calls for little description. In its early days it was made to give three indications, the all-right signal being shown by the arm lowered flush with the post and the caution and danger signals by the positions at forty-five degrees and at right angles respectively.

With the introduction of the block system, the caution signal became unnecessary and the former position now indicates all right. When the arm was lowered flush with the post it had practically the effect of making the signal invisible, and this was of course an objectionable feature according to modern standards. For many years, even after the introduction of the block system, the all-right signal was given by night by a white light. The white light is unsatisfactory as a signal light, as it is difficult to distinguish it from white lights used for other purposes. Further, in the event of the red spectacle being broken a white light would appear and thus give a false all-right signal'.

A victim, misled: The documentary includes the histrionic account of an unnamed journey-maker who claims to have had first-hand experience of misleading signals. 'I walked up the slope and along to the end of the Platform, before waiting at the top of the steps. I didn't want to venture too boldly. They say that if you go all the way to the end, there are steps that become ever more treacherous, until you're drawn towards what's known to as "the blazing incinerator"'. Its doors close on you before it steadily descends, carrying you to the underground with it, incandescent but ultimately doomed. That's why they say it's best to wait on the Platform. But when I saw a light flashing on and off, bright blasts of red, then white light confused me and all thoughts of a furnace went straight out of my mind. I thought it was a call for help. I took a step forward and a few more before I realised that the lights had diminished. Ahead of me was what looked like a person of enormous height. The body was more like a statue. From its side, a vast appendage moved up and down in a silent gesture. I thought it was an arm or some sort of giant mannish erection. It then

stood horizontally in such a sustained manner that could only have been possible, in my experience, if it was in fact a mechanical device. I assumed the object was important, but I have no idea what it meant’.

A comprehensive explanation is offered by C. B. Byles: ‘For the guidance of the signalman who may require to see a signal from behind, a small white light is shown at the back and when the signal is lowered this is obscured by a blinker working with the arm. Some companies use a purple light for the danger indication in siding and other subsidiary signals. Formerly the signal arm was maintained in the horizontal position by the weight of the down rod and the balance lever at the foot of the post and thus, in the event of the rod fracturing, the signal might assume the all-right position improperly. A mishap arising from this cause called attention to the matter and led to the adoption of balanced signal arms. The balancing of the signal arm is effected by giving sufficient weight of metal in the casting carrying the arm and spectacle to overcome the weight of the arm itself; thus even should the rod break the arm will retain the horizontal position’.

Material evidence: The documentary includes reproductions of a series of photographic negatives with no known provenance. The images depict antiquated railway semaphore signals – but the purpose and meaning of the images (as opposed to the signals, or the objects) have yet to be explained. The point is made that both signs and signals are indicators. But where the former might be unintentional, the latter are generally produced with the deliberate intention of conveying information, such as a warning. Although the status of the objects is touched upon, the documentary ends inconclusively suggesting only that the signals (conveyed by the image and the object) are messages from the past; as such they are currently considered to be both ‘unhelpful’ and ‘non-communicative’ (*The Line*: 3).

The platform announcer exposed as disembodied automaton

Worshipful Company of Conductors resigns en masse amidst confusion over announcer’s condition

The PA intends to persevere with her work despite being denounced as an automaton by the Worshipful Company of Conductors (WCC). The Conductors, formerly employed by the LNR and renowned for their ‘human touch’, had refused to undertake any operations on the platform until the PA came to terms with ‘her abysmal condition’. She had, they claimed, attracted their attention when the standard practice of relaying information was interspersed with sentimental overtones and informal disclosures.

In her response to this news, the PA employed exemplary obliqueness: ‘Messages are accurate at the point of delivery’ and ‘There is a good service on all lines’. And there you have it – it is precisely

such discontinuous narratives that raised the hackles of the WCC. The suggestion of personal communication, fractured though it may be, impinges upon the territory of the Conductors, forcing them to vacate the platform. However, not ones to go quietly, the WCC produced what amounts to a retraction of their all too hasty judgement on the beleaguered PA, when yesterday they released the following statement:

The statement of the WCC with regard to the PA:

Further to the PA's (Platform Announcer's) recent messages, complaints were received about a lack of quantifiable mobility on the Platform. We the Worshipful Company of Conductors felt it was incumbent upon us to make a public record of the accurate state of affairs: neither the Line nor the Platform constitute a mode of transport, at least not by any conventional understanding of the term.

Our initial assessment was as follows: we were inclined to accuse the Announcer of blatant deception with regard to the Platform and its relationship to a journey. We noted that the announcements encourage people to step onto the Platform creating the impression of imminent transportation from one place to another. The *giving of false hope* being a likely consequence of her non-human condition. Direct and meaningful communication is the work of an embodied Conductor. It is our considered opinion that any attempt to imply consciousness behind the Announcer's messages is bound to cause confusion, if not wilful misdirection, when the accurate communication of information is crucial to public safety on the Platform.

However, one of our number has insisted that we attend to the specificity of the Announcer's words. Evidently, traces of emotion can be detected in some of her messages. There is much that the Announcer grasps at with feeble descriptions but she has pretensions to being moved, and if so, are her claims of a meaningful existence to be considered as feasible?

We are experienced in differentiating between the living and the dead, having learned our trade on the renowned London Necropolis Railway (LNR) where we guided people from London Waterloo to Brookwood Cemetery. Unlike the contemporary Necropolitan Platform operation, the LNR had a rapid steam powered engine on which many hundreds were apparently conveyed by locomotion. Many hundreds of corpses were displaced, but we assert that they never "moved", this being an experience reserved for the living. Frequently we encountered sad and lost souls who insisted they were travelling to a better place. They said they wanted the whole story. Our own advice was not to pursue the end of the Line. Reaching the end, as a destination, is terminal – once you get there, it's over. If anyone insisted, we the members of the Worshipful Company of Conductors could only do our best to guide them on their way.

Invariably people on the LNR imagined they were looking through windows, at a world that turned sedately as they rushed through it. The sense of the great surge and exhilaration of a journey would convince them they could see and feel themselves as an accelerated mobile entity,

in the fullness of life flow. There were gardens and cars, they said, there were birds overhead, rabbits in fields and trees swaying, responding to the wind. These were difficult conversations, but we had to guide their intangible expectations, gently persuading them to examine their sense of embedded-ness. As they struggled with the passing of all thought, the last flicker of their inner eye would withdraw before it refocused on the dirty window. Brown dusty stains blurred their lucidity and perhaps a tiny black insect would make its way towards the grime encrusted edges of the sealant on the inner side of the window frame. We said, "Look beyond the surface. What you see is nothing more than a distraction. And now what do you perceive?" At first they said nothing, but as their gaze adjusted we said, "Look again. Turn inwardly. Peer into your consciousness, and concentrate. You are not actually in motion. Everything out there is moving. You are still. And you cannot protest. Neither can you point to the trees. What are those branches really doing? They're waving goodbye." In retrospect then, not every conversation was undertaken with the compassion that the wretchedness of the situation demanded. With this in mind, we acknowledge that it is possible that at some point during our time with the LNR, somehow with a gross neglect of duty, we may have failed to Conduct with a sufficient degree of grace, and in this way we left an excess of humanity, stranded.

We are forced to conclude that the Platform Announcer could be such an extraneous presence: the morbid surplus of neglected thought, trapped in the system. It is with deepest regret that we acknowledge possible failures; these only serve to reinforce our decision to decline further service on the Platform' (*The Line*: 4).

Work on platform suspended

Work on the contemporary platform in Leeds has been suspended pending the forthcoming Resources Review that is expected to highlight causes for concern. As the platform is not connected to the main line but is instead marooned at a tangent to the everyday, it has to date evaded scrutiny. However, escalating costs have led to questions about its effectiveness. A spokeswoman said 'It has come to our attention that the Platform may not, after all, be strictly necessary. Detailed investigations have revealed that it is simply a prop, setting up expectations that are unfulfilled. People arrive only to leave again. Some wait but nothing substantive comes or stays. Indeed, it is a form overly involved with absenting. Bodies and messages pass through or over the Platform on their way out. We therefore suggest that the only practical function of this structure is to raise the ground. It was recommended that we consider more economical, less materially profligate alternatives, such as lowering the track, in which case the ground can remain where it is'. Work on the platform will be put on hold until this issue is resolved (*The Line*: 1).

Acknowledgements

This article uses gallery notes for the invigilators as its starting point, supplied by Lisa Le Feuvre, December 2015.

References

- Byles, C. (1910), *The First Principles of Railway Signalling*, London: Railway Gazette.
 Janney, E. H. (1873), *Improvements in Car-Couplings*, part of Letters Patent No. 138,405, 29 April 1873, United States Patent Office.
 Palmer, K. (2015), *The Line*, Leeds: The Henry Moore Foundation.

Suggested citation

Palmer, K. (2017), 'Dislocated composition: Overview, transcript and selected articles with reference to The Necropolitan Line', *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, 10:1, pp. 55–75, doi: 10.1386/jwcp.10.1.55_1

Contributor details

Palmer's work takes the form of printed matter and elaborated audio environments. Found objects and found sites are presented in written and spoken storytelling in conjunction with fragmented documentation. By highlighting the role of words, as opposed to objects, the works refer to absences, often inviting the audience to imagine items that are indicated, but not fully present. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Three Stories* are flattened (Void Gallery, Derry, 2016) and *End Matter* (Artangel 2015). Authored publications include *The Time-Travelling Circus: The Dossier on Pablo Fanque and the Electrolier* for the complete edition of *Essays on Sculpture*, Number 78 (Henry Moore Institute, 2017), *The Fabricator's Tale* (Book Works, 2014) and *The Dark Object* (Book Works, 2010). Palmer contributes to publications such as *The Object: Documents of Contemporary Art* series (Whitechapel Gallery/MIT, 2014) and *Modern British Sculpture* (Royal Academy of Art, 2011).

E-mail: katrina.palmer@csm.arts.ac.uk

Katrina Palmer has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.